

season in the White House and the last time I'll have a chance to be here at the lighting of the Christmas tree, we are profoundly grateful for the gift you and all the American people have given us, the privilege to serve these last 8 years, to live in this marvelous old house, and to participate in wonderful ceremonies like this.

For Americans of many faiths, this is a season of renewal, of light returned from darkness, despair transformed to hope, a time to reflect on our lives, rejoice in our blessings, and give thanks. Tonight, on this first Christmas of the new millennium, we celebrate an America blessed with unprecedented peace and prosperity and a nation that through more than 220 years and even the toughest times has held together by the enduring values enshrined in our Constitution.

This is a time for us to reflect, too, on that good fortune and a time to rededicate ourselves to the lessons of love and reconciliation taught by a child born in Bethlehem 2000 years ago. As we gather to decorate our trees and light our menorahs, let us remember the true meaning of the holidays by taking some time to give to those who need it most. And let us be thankful for the sacrifices of all those who serve us, especially those who serve us in the military who won't be home this year for Christmas.

Let me say that when I leave you tonight, I'm going to Northern Ireland, to a small island where people were born that eventually came to America and gave us over 40 million of our citizens; a place where Saint Patrick brought the spirit of Christmas almost 1,500 years ago. I hope that we can finish the business of peace there and help, again, America to give a gift to the rest of the world.

To all of you, again I say, this has been a humbling and wondrous gift. We thank you, all of us in our family, for the chance to serve yours. God bless you; merry Christmas, and let's light the tree.

Thank you very much. Ready, set, go!

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:55 p.m. on the Ellipse during the annual Christmas Pageant of Peace. In his remarks, he referred to musicians Kathy Mattea, Charlotte Church, and Billy Gilman; television weatherman Al Roker, master of ceremonies, and Peter Nostrand, chairman,

Christmas Pageant of Peace; and artist Thomas Kinkade.

Statement on the Termination of Irish Deportation Proceedings

December 11, 2000

I strongly support the Attorney General's decision, at the request of the Secretary of State, to take action to terminate deportation proceedings against six individuals and to refrain from initiating proceedings against three others. All nine individuals had served sentences in the United Kingdom for activity connected with the IRA but are physically present in the United States. While in no way approving or condoning their past criminal acts, I believe that removing the threat of deportation for these individuals will contribute to the peace process in Northern Ireland. The Attorney General's decision is consistent with steps taken by the British Government under the Good Friday accord to release prisoners in Northern Ireland and reintegrate them into normal society as part of a process of reconciliation. Her decision will also reinforce efforts by the Governments and the parties in Northern Ireland to implement in full all aspects of the Good Friday accord.

Statement on Signing the Water Resources Development Act of 2000

December 11, 2000

Today I have signed into law S. 2796, the "Water Resources Development Act of 2000," a multibillion dollar omnibus bill to authorize water projects and programs of the United States Army Corps of Engineers.

I am very pleased that this bill authorizes the Administration's plan to restore an unprecedented natural resource—America's Everglades. Thanks to an historic partnership among Federal, State, tribal, and local leaders, we can begin in earnest an over 30-year journey to complete the largest and most ambitious ecosystem restoration project in the world.

Since the beginning of our first term, the Vice President and I have made Everglades restoration a priority. We have provided the